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SUBJECT: Serbia: New Poll Indicates Softening Support for Radical Party

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11. SUMMARY: The latest poll (conducted in early September) by a well-respected electoral/political NGO in Serbia, records a significant softening in the popularity of the Radical Party and an improvement for PM Kostunica's DSS party. The results continue to show sky-high rates of abstention and indecision but suggest: that prospects for an SRS victory may be overstated and that the non-nationalist democratic parties will benefit by an aggressive, focused GOTV campaign. End Summary

Numerical Snapshot

12. Representatives of the prestigious election-assistance NGO, Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) recently briefed poloffs on the preliminary results of their Summer 2006 public opinion poll. Based on only 2 million "sure" voters SRS and DS are tied at 30%, the DSS has 14% (up from 9% last quarter), while Socialists hold steady at 6.4%. Poll results indicate that only these four parties would pass the 5% threshold for Parliamentary representation if elections now. Just as telling are the results on party preferences which indicate a definite orientation of the electorate around the coalition of ex DOS (the democratic parties that joined to beat Milosevic). The data, based on a sample size of over 1600 respondents, examined intentions and preferences of the Serbian electorate with regard to Serbia's national political parties. Chief analyst Zoran Lucic, noted that the results while surprising were exceptionally stable and quite consistent.

13. Roughly, out of total Serbian electorate of 6.5 million voters only about 2 million are likely, decided voters. Almost 2 million are undecided either whether to vote and for whom, about 700,000 declined to disclose voting intention and just under 800,000 will not vote. The other 1 million never vote for different reasons.

Poll results

14. Following are poll results:

- Question:

If elections were held tomorrow, would you vote and who would you vote for?

Likely/Decided voters 2.021.000

DS - Boris Tadic	615.000	30.4%
SRS - Tomislav Nikolic	614.000	30.4%
DSS - Vojislav Kostunica	280.000	13.8%
SPS - Ivica Dacic	130.000	6.4%
SPO - Vuk Draskovic	93.000	4.6%
NS - Velja Ilic	73.000	3.6%
G17+ - Mladjan Dinkic	63.000	3.1%
LDP - Ceda Jovanovic	53.000	2.6%

Undecided 1.980.000

Undisclosed voting intention 709.500

Won't vote 789.500

- Question (for undecided voters only):
Which party is closest to you?

DS	388.000	30%
DSS	277.000	21.4%
SRS	211.000	16.3%
G17+	119.000	9.2%
SPS	98.000	7.6%
NS	79.000	6.1%
SPO	53.000	4.1%
PSS	36.000	2.8%
LDP	32.000	2.6%
D/K	668.778	
Total	1.963.500	

- Question (for those who declined to disclose voting intention only):
Which party is closest to you?

DS	125.000	28.1%
SRS	112.000	25.2%
DSS	79.000	17.8%
SPS	43.000	9.6%
G17+	30.000	6.7%
NS	26.500	5.9%
PSS	13.500	3%
LDP	10.000	2.2%
SPO	6.500	1.5%
D/K	257.652	
Total	703.588	

Analysis

15. For the first time in almost two years, the poll records a drop in the support of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS). Comparison of

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results from CESID's Spring 2006 poll and the latest numbers show that almost 300,000 voters who said they would vote for the Radical party in elections are now abstaining. Over the same time period, support for President's Tadic Democratic Party (DS) increased slightly, while Prime Minister's Kostunica Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) increased significantly (pollsters told us by 5%). Besides these three, only the SPS will pass 5 percent threshold. Translated into Parliamentary seats if elections were held today a new Parliament would look like this (total 250):

DS	90
SRS	90
DSS	40
SPS	18

(Minority parties 12)

16. Lucic opined that the results suggest resistance in the Serbian electorate to the hardening rhetoric of the radicals over the last several months, reminiscent of inflammatory and virulent rhetoric of the 90's. SRS supporters seemed to be split between economic populist issues and territorial anti-minority ones, with less cross-over than might be expected. The big winner -- exploiting the government's 1.5 billion euro sale of Mobtel and the government's position on Kosovo (firm but "statesman like") -- is the DSS.

17. According to the poll, party preferences suggest a high voter turn out scenario would mean as much as 55% of the electorate supporting the "democratic bloc" (DS, DSS, SPO, LDP and G-17 Plus) with only 27% for the social-nationalistic bloc (SPS, SRS). This strong democratic potential, according to chief pollster Zoran Lucic, would only be fully realized through a careful door-to-door campaign involving an aggressive and focused effort by political parties in a targeted GOTV campaign.

18. Comment: These findings are another indication that an active and aggressive effort by democratic parties in the field is far more

important to a democratic victory over the Radicals then a debate about the electoral timetable. While admittedly only the first suggestion in recent polls that the conventional wisdom about the strong prospects for the Radicals even in a post-Kosovo settlement election might be wrong, it is in keeping with anecdotal information indicating some nervousness and disarray in the Radical camp. Lucic notes that traditionally opposition parties have only a limited window of opportunity to translate dissatisfaction into electoral victory. The CESID poll might be an indicator that the window may have begun to close. We will be working the other side of the equation -- aggressive field work by the other parties -- in our GOTV campaign in the months ahead. End Comment.

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